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ABSTRACT

In Canada there exists a need to prepare the teaching force, which is primarily monocultural and monolingual, to work with an increasingly ethnoculturally diverse student population. This paper defines the term "ethnocultural," and presents three dimensions of ethnocultural knowledge that are essential to the ongoing professional and pedagogical development of preservice and inservice teachers. "Ethnocultural" has been chosen as a term that appears to incorporate all the facets that make up a person or a group. It encompasses ethnicity, or racial background, and the aspects of culture that include nuances of language, heritage, personal behavior, and self-identification, and it is free of the political connotations of the term "multiculturalism." Three key variables constitute the core meaning of the term: ethnicity, shared patterns of socially acceptable behavior, and language. Three dimensions of ethnocultural knowledge are required of teachers. These are the cultural, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic dimensions. The cultural dimension has often been emphasized, but the pedagogical and sociolinguistic dimensions deserve greater emphasis as teachers look for approaches that reach all students. (Contains 98 references.) (SLD)

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Learning to Teach Ethnoculturally Diverse Students: The Role of Teacher Educators[1]

A Paper Presented to the Annual Meeting of the

American Educational Research Association

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Learning to Teach Ethnoculturally Diverse Students: The Role of Teacher Educators

Recent research in the United States (e.g., Banks, 1991; Grant & Secada, 1990; Reed, 1993; Zimpher, 1988 [cited in Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 303]) has indicated that the majority of teachers, both employed and in preservice training, are white, middle class, monocultural and monolingual females. Lomax (1973) and Tomlinson (1981) found similar patterns in England, as did Corson (1993) in New Zealand. There appears to be a paucity of such research in Canada, although Lockhart's (1991) analysis of Canadian census data would appear to support the generalization. Solomon (1996) observed that "while there are no reliable estimates of teachers of colour in Canadian classrooms, it is quite safe to speculate that they are grossly underrepresented" (p. 231). Goddard (1996) found similar underrepresentation in preservice education courses.

This contrasts with the demographic situation in many Canadian classrooms, where First Nations students mix with a myriad of immigrant peoples to produce an ethnoculturally diverse student population.

It appears that in Canada, an avowed multicultural society, there exists a need to prepare a primarily monocultural and monolingual teaching force to work with an increasingly ethnoculturally diverse, or at least ethnoculturally different, student population. "Ethnocultural" is a relatively new term in the educational lexicon. In this paper the term is defined, and three dimensions of ethnocultural knowledge are presented and discussed. These dimensions are considered integral to the ongoing professional and pedagogical development of preservice and inservice teachers.

Why Ethnocultural? A Rationale and Definition

One of the problems experienced by those who wish to discuss the cultural dialectic (Moore, 1994) between Anglo teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds is that a variety of terms have come into common usage. Culturally diverse, culturally homogeneous, culturally heterogeneous, and culturally different are all used as descriptors for the cultural background of student populations being compared with the cultural background of the teacher. Solomon (1996) argues that the majority of underrepresented groups in Canada are people of colour, preferring to 'collapse' First Nations peoples and People of Refugee Background under that one heading. I do not believe that such a collective exists. Indeed, I find it problematic that in incorporating all groups into the one there is a danger that the essence of diversity may itself be lost.

In an educational setting, the very term 'culture' requires elaboration. Does this simply refer to ethnicity, with Afro-Canadian and First Nation and Anglo being the differentiating characteristics? If so, to what extent could one justifiably reduce the label to define a group? Should Anglo refer to all of European heritage, be they English or French or Italian? Is it a linguistic issue, referring to those for whom English is a first language and, if so, how would one differentiate between English and Scot and Channel Islander, all of whom share a common language and yet have quite different cultural backgrounds? There are many First Nations in Canada, of which one is known as the Dene, or people. Within the Dene, however, there are a number of individual and separate Nations who share variations of a common language; the Slavey, Dogrib, and Chipewyan peoples, for example. Even within one specific language group, such as the Chipewyan, there are sub-groups with distinct cultural patterns – the People of the

Caribou, the People of the Trembling Aspen, and so forth. To define a group in terms of either ethnicity or language alone may lead to problems of precision in terms of interpretation.

If both language and ethnicity could be used as descriptors, and yet neither is useful as the definitive descriptor, then should culture be defined by anthropologists such as Benedict (1959/1934), Malinowski (1926), or Mead (1955)? Harris (1980) summarized the anthropological definition of culture as being "the learned patterns of behaviour and thought characteristic of a societal group" (p. 557). This definition, however, does not take into account those who have unlearned the patterns of behaviour of their own society by immersion in Anglo teacher education programs and subsequent enculturation into the patterns of behaviour and thought characteristic of the dominant society. Nor, indeed, does it take into account those who have self-identified with a particular group and yet, for a variety of reasons, share neither language, behaviour, nor geographic residence with the majority of that group. Such groups include many of the Métis people, for example, as well as third generation Canadians born of Chinese descent, and so forth.

After much deliberation I would suggest the adoption of a term which appears to incorporate all those facets of what makes up a person or group. This term deals with ethnicity, or racial background, and with aspects of culture including nuances of language, heritage, personal behaviour, thought patterns (with implications for teaching and learning styles), and self-identification. Furthermore, this is a term which invokes neither the radical political connotations associated with contemporary multiculturalism (e.g., Nieto, 1992; Sleeter, 1989), the basing of multiculturalism "on 'ideology' rather than on 'culture' as lived by the people" (John Ogbu, personal communication, March

1996), nor the distinctions between multicultural and anti-racist education which Sleeter (1995) found in current discussions in the field. This term, 'ethnocultural', is not a new concept but rather one which has enjoyed some usage in the literature of the past 25 years.

I first came across the term at a recent conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education (Ryan & Wignall, 1994). A subsequent search of the ERIC and PsycLIT databases located 93 references to the term. The earliest reference is in a bibliography of Canadian ethnic groups compiled for the Ontario government (Gregorovich, 1972). The term has also been widely used in the psychological and medical literature since the early 1970s.

Edelstein (1974) discussed how ethnocultural identity influences the experience and mastery of pain while Zuelzer, Stedman, and Adams (1976) explored the influence of ethnocultural and socioeconomic determinants on the IQ scores of first grade students. The studies of Jalali, Jalali, and Turner (1978), at Yale, focused on how ethnocultural background affected patient attitudes toward mental illness while Ageyev (1988) pursued similar ethnopsychological research in Russia. There are references to ethnocultural issues in literature from the fields of psychotherapy (e.g., Comas-Diaz & Jacobsen, 1987, 1991; Remington & DaCosta, 1989), health care delivery (e.g., Browne, 1986; Wang & Marsh, 1992), and substance abuse (Terrell, 1993), to provide some examples.

The transfer to education appears to have occurred by osmosis through the membrane of educational psychology and linguistics. For example, Fishman (1980) and Danesi (1983) discuss bilingualism and language development in different ethnocultural groups while Shade (1989) explores differences in perceptual development. This is somewhat surprising, as one might anticipate that the expected route would be through anthropology

and educational foundations. That it was not further strengthens the need for care in the use of the term, and supports the suggestion that ethnocultural diversity is more than an issue of language or ethnicity.

The Manitoba Department of Education (1984) and Lister (1987) discussed the need for a recognition of ethnocultural diversity among curriculum developers, a policy requirement also described by Mock and Masemann (1989). This recognition of a multiplicity of ethnocultural groups has also been explored by Friesen (1987), Porter-Fantini (1989), and others. Churchill (1990) has discussed the need for the evaluation of educational policy to recognize the ethnocultural diversity of those affected by that policy. In this he is reinforcing the comments of Boyd (1978), who explored the role of the public education system in the mediation and resolution of social and ethnocultural class conflicts arising from the implementation of ethnoculturally insensitive policy ideas.

In suggesting the wider adoption of the term ethnocultural, therefore, I would include all those dimensions previously described. The term is not restricted to a simple identification by ethnicity or language.

Rather, ethnocultural is conceptualized as consisting of a number of variables. These variables are simultaneously competing and complementary, for each impacts upon the others to a greater or lesser extent. Three key variables constitute the core meaning of the term and eight other variables are perceived to modify those key variables. The three key variables are ethnicity, shared patterns of socially acceptable behaviour, and language. The modifying variables are social class, gender, age, economic status, family structure, religion, geographical location, and access to political power. The discussion of ethnocultural diversity therefore is a discussion of a variety of combinations of the three

key variables, influenced as they are by the modifying variables. It is also recognized, although not explored in this study, that many communities are also marginalized by their socioeconomic class status. The three key variables are accepted as being the most effective means of distinguishing one ethnocultural group from another, with the influence of the modifying variables on each ethnocultural group being implicitly recognized in the discussion.

Ethnocultural Knowledge

A review of the literature has identified three dimensions to the ethnocultural knowledge required of teachers who are, or will be, working with students from ethnoculturally diverse backgrounds. I have termed these as the cultural, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic dimensions of ethnocultural knowledge. These dimensions of ethnocultural knowledge are found, to varying degrees, in most teacher education programs and are part of the ongoing professional education of teachers.

The first, and most prevalent, is the cultural dimension. This is what educators often think of when they refer to ethnocultural knowledge. The idea that an awareness of ethnicity is useful is both important and relevant to teacher effectiveness. It is not, however, the only aspect of ethnocultural knowledge. A teacher should also recognize the pedagogical and sociolinguistic dimensions of this variable. These two areas have received too little emphasis in either the literature or in the practice of teachers and, because they are limited to specialized courses within teacher education programs, are seldom explored by preservice teachers. I would suggest that one role of teacher educators is to enhance and facilitate the integration of ethnocultural knowledge throughout all aspects of teacher education programs.

The Cultural Dimension

This is the first dimension of ethnocultural knowledge. There have been many calls for the cultural preparation of teachers over the past three decades (e.g., Collins & Hanson, 1992; Landes, 1965; Leskiw & Girhiny, 1992; Myers & Myers, 1990; Sheehan, 1992; Stewart, 1979; Turner & Rushton, 1974). Fenton and Nancarrow (1986) and Werner, Connors, Aoki, and Dahlie (1977) provided general support for the position that courses should be ethnic in name, content, and perspective and this support was reflected in experiments like the Cultural Literacy Laboratory (University of Arizona, 1973). The U.S. Office of Education (1976) expected that such courses would provide effective training for those who intended to work with ethnoculturally diverse students and with those students who were ethnoculturally different from the teacher.

Szasz (1991) and Thomson (1978) believed that such courses would allow teachers to develop ethnocultural sensitivity while the Ontario Task Force (1976) on Aboriginal education, in a position supported by Dickason (1992) and Warnica (1986), recommended that Native culture, history, and philosophy courses be mandatory for all students who will become teachers of Native children. Jacob and Jordan (1993) have recently claimed that preservice teachers should be required to develop an understanding of the genetic, cultural deficit, and status attainment explanations of student achievement through what Washburn (1981) has called a comprehension of cultural pluralism.

Butterfield (1985) noted that the ability to adapt practice so as to reflect culturally appropriate curricula and skills is most important. Similarly, the U. S. Department of Education (1990) claimed that the development of cultural awareness and knowledge should be a requirement for all teachers, a position supported by Zeichner (1992). In an

examination of problems facing teacher educators in Israel, Yair (1993) showed how Sephardic Jews had difficulty in adopting and absorbing individualized western abstract thought processes because they were used to the emotional thinking and dependence on authority associated with their own culture. The ethnoculturally prepared teacher will be aware of these distinctions and will use the appropriate teaching style with different categories of learner.

The ethnocultural experience in preservice teacher education programs should not be one centered in the tacit absorption of information gleaned from textbooks. There are efforts to incorporate new technology into the learning of cultural knowledge. For example a recent report (Tribes go high tech, 1994) noted that "interactive videodisc and hypertext technology [was used in New Mexico schools] to help students learn Zuñi language and culture" (p. 49). There is no reason why teacher education programs cannot similarly access modern technology to teach ethnocultural differences to preservice teachers.

The Pedagogical Dimension

This is the second dimension of ethnocultural knowledge. Sikkema and Niyekawa (1987) noted that "we often assume that people of another culture or subculture see, feel, and think as we do. . . . Much misunderstanding is caused by the assumption that our own reactions are universal" (p. 2), a position supported by Ramsey (1987). Sikkema and Niyekawa (1987) believed that these assumptions often lead to the misinterpretation of the verbal and non-verbal cues that assist us to predict responses. This in turn leads us to what Corson (1991) argued is the reinforcement of negative stereotypes which occurs when we do not receive the reaction we expect. Ramsey (1987) noted that "many studies

have demonstrated the overt and covert ways that teachers' responses vary according to the race and gender of students. These behaviours include offering supportive versus critical attention, giving eye contact, and making non-verbal gestures" (p. 41). Teachers who are not aware of the ethnocultural diversity of communication cues can make terrible mistakes in their interpretation of student responses. As Sikkema and Niyekawa (1987) discussed, "until we learn the cues of the other culture, we find ourselves in an unstructured situation, not knowing what to do or expect. This unsettling experience is called 'culture shock'" (p. 5).

It is important, then, that all teachers be aware of what Corson (1991) has termed the "language and dialect repertoires" of their students (p. 12). They must accept the validity of different dialects, for example, understand how these differences can have an effect on reading and writing skills, and adjust their assessment processes accordingly. Although, as Grassby (1983) pointed out, English is often the "language of upward mobility" (p. 9) in many societies, it is the responsibility of the teacher to also value and validate non-standard variations of the language. In this, as Ramsey (1987) affirms, the teacher is the "critical variable" (p. 40) in the teaching process. To recognize that not all dialectical variations are the same, and that different means of communication are preferred and valued by different ethnocultural groups, is crucial for educators. What works with one group may be ineffective with another, as found by Lomotey and Swanson (1990) in their study of effective rural and urban American schools. They note that "despite their success in teaching the basic skills to poor white populations, their [rural schools] record with poor African-American and Hispanic populations is abysmal" (p. 79).

There have been many cases where individual interventions seem to have had an impact on minority group student achievement. One means of establishing effective literacy programs in Hispanic communities has been to combine parental and student learning, for example through the "literature backpack" approach described by Busco (1991). Another is Candelaria's (1992) belief that monolingual teachers should be provided with bilingual teachers' guides in order to properly understand the needs of Hispanic students, an approach she took in Puerto Rico.

In order to meet the needs of minority groups it is imperative that teachers recognize the cultural idiosyncrasies of learning and implement teaching strategies which facilitate the learning process. In his study of education in the Kingdom of Tonga, Forté (1993) noted the importance of memory in cultural discourse and highlighted the usefulness of memorizing as a teaching strategy. These findings were supported by those of Afele-Fa'amuli (1992), who found that the predominantly oral culture of American Samoa led to non-indigenous knowledge being acquired more effectively when the teacher used discussion and demonstration strategies rather than lecturing.

The isolated reserves of Canadian First Nations, if mapped against the ocean of the majority culture, appear similar to islands mapped against the Pacific. This similarity goes beyond geographical isolation. The work of Afele-Fa'amuli (1992) in American Samoa and Forté (1993) in Tonga has implications for teachers in the oral cultures of many North American First Nations. Such an awareness of ethnoculturally appropriate pedagogy allows the teacher to plan each lesson in a way which targets the appropriate learning style of the student. Afele-Fa'amuli (1992) also found that learning occurred best in small groups of different aged people from neighbouring households, a finding which

might be considered when a school organizes its student population into classes. This research needs to be discussed so that teachers are made aware of strategies which might increase their effectiveness in the classroom.

The Sociolinguistic Dimension

This is the third dimension of ethnocultural knowledge. There is a broad literature on the linguistic development of minority learners, a literature which is generally outside the scope of this discussion, however a review of some of the salient material will place the need for the ethnocultural preparation of teachers within the broader context of sociolinguistic development.

Teachers can learn to understand that nuances of discourse are not consistent across ethnocultural boundaries. Such an understanding might lessen conflicts between students and teachers. For example, Eslamirasekh (1992) noted that Persian speakers are significantly more direct when making requests compared to American students. This trait can be perceived as rudeness by a teacher who is not aware of the ethnoculturally preferred style of discourse. Such a perception can lead, in turn, to conflict and anger.

Smith (1968) spoke quite generally about the need for teachers to be aware of specific English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching strategies. Smith (1979) argued that teachers in the Northwest Territories must have ESL teaching skills, as did MacDiarmid (1974) and Pulu (1975) with respect to the Yupik people of Alaska. Spolsky (1975) and Vorih and Rosier (1978) made similar arguments in a Navajo context. It is apparent that teachers who work primarily with children for whom English is a second language or dialect should be aware of such strategies.

Recent research by Vogt, Jordan, and Tharp (1993) indicates that ESL strategies are not always transferable and should be grounded in the sociocultural context of the community. Those strategies and techniques which they found to be successful in the Hawaiian schools were not equally successful when transplanted to Navajo schools in Arizona (p. 60). Although preservice programs might be able to provide novice teachers with an understanding of general ESL strategies, more specific information should also be provided at the local level.

Research by Leith and Slentz (1989) on what teaching strategies were considered successful in Northern Manitoba schools supports Grassby's (1983) contention that "literacy follows the oral communication process" (p. 11). Rodriguez (1979) recommended that the procedures and techniques of literacy must be preceded by an understanding of the importance of non-standard dialogue if language learning is to be effective. Darton and Linville (1977), Landon (1988), and Stairs (1988), among others, claimed that there should be compulsory language training for all preservice teachers. Other authors agree that such training is required for preservice teachers but also believe that effective inservice programs must be developed so that all teachers, experienced as well as novice, might learn to understand and deal with language problems (e.g., Burnaby, 1980; Burnaby, Elson, Appelt, & Holt, 1982; Mohawk, 1985; Smith, 1972). Inservice programs might also have the effect of sensitizing teachers to the sociolinguistic realities of their own communities. This, in turn, might allow them to develop ethnoculturally specific strategies instead of relying on general, and generalizable, ideas.

Researchers in cross-cultural education, such as Barnhardt (1982), Irvine and York (1995), Kleinfeld (1974, 1975), Pablano (1973), and Tafoya (1981), among others,

recommended that preservice teachers should be trained in a variety of instructional or teaching styles. Other strategies might include the use of interactive computer and videodisc programs, as described by Sponder and Schall (1990), the cultural journals developed by Temple and Gillett (1984), or the drama-based activities Foreman (1991) used to facilitate minority student learning. It is true that much of this knowledge can be provided to preservice teachers as part of an expanded program of studies. In and of itself, however, passive learning is insufficient as a means of true ethnocultural preparation.

Sikkema and Niyekawa (1987) differentiated between a passive understanding of cultural difference and an active awareness of an ethnoculturally different individual or group. They note that whereas a passive understanding of ethnocultural difference can be learned through books, film, travel, art, and so forth, "for those who will be interacting with people of other cultures . . . [in situations] where more than superficial communication is required, such passive understanding is far from sufficient" (p. 3). For teachers in ethnoculturally diverse classrooms it is important that they move beyond intellectual and rational understanding to "the development at gut level of an attitude of acceptance, respect, and tolerance of cultural differences" (p. 4). Such an active understanding cannot be learned only in the classrooms of a teacher education program. It must also be forged and reinforced through experiential learning at the school site.

Conclusion

In this paper I have suggested that "ethnocultural" is a more appropriate term for our use than are multicultural, cross-cultural, or inter-cultural. I have defined the term and

have identified and discussed three dimensions of ethnocultural knowledge which form an integral part of the professional and pedagogical development of preservice teachers.

It is important that teachers, especially through their preservice education programs, develop an awareness of ethnocultural diversity. For teachers to understand what Hilliard (as cited in Sikkema & Niyekawa, 1987) meant when he wrote that all school subjects "must be freed from the monocultural ethnocentric focus that characterizes most standard course work" (p. 9) would be a great step forward in educational practice. This understanding cannot develop in a vacuum. As Ramsey (1987) pointed out, "to begin to understand the role that race, culture, and class play in perceptions of the world, it is helpful to explore experiences and reactions in a safe and supportive environment" (p. 43). Teacher educators should strive to ensure that their classes provide such an environment for preservice teachers. Further, they should use their influence with school administrators to ensure that an enhanced awareness of ethnocultural knowledge is part of the formal professional development program of the school. In this manner we might better equip the primarily monocultural and monolingual Canadian teaching force to be effective teachers of our increasingly ethnoculturally diverse student population.

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